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Sen. George announces legislation to preserve Michigan's natural beauty

Lansing- Sen. Tom George (R-Texas Twp) today announced legislation to preserve Michigan's beautiful vistas by exploring advertising opportunities for businesses other than billboards. He was joined by former Lt. Governor Dick Posthumus and former Attorney General Frank Kelly, along with representatives from other groups dedicated to preserving the scenic beauty of Michigan.

"Few measures would have more impact on improving the aesthetic beauty of Michigan's out-of-doors than reducing the clutter that billboards create in our open spaces," Posthumus said.

Four states have banned the use of off-premise billboards. Maine, Hawaii, Vermont and Alaska have chosen instead to maintain their landscapes and provide a more tourist- and business-friendly means of promoting services. Oregon and Rhode Island have placed a moratorium on new billboards and Vermont has shown an increase in tourism since the removal of all off-premise billboards.

"Part of the charm and attraction of Michigan is its scenic beauty," George said. "We recognize that billboards provide important information to Michigan's motorists and we do not wish to eliminate them. However, we have reached the saturation point."

The new legislation would not eliminate billboard use but instead explore other effective means to help businesses advertise by creating:

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- a Billboard Advisory Council to define a best-practice approach for the billboard industry. It would consist of 12 members appointed by the governor for two-year terms;
- a Billboard Cleanup Fund to help remove abandoned signs. It would be supported by renewal fees, which would be increased from \$25 to \$50 for billboards from 8 feet to 300 feet, and from \$40 to \$100 for signs larger than 300 feet, as of Oct. 1, 2004;
- a fifth logo – a low-cost alternative for advertising for tourist attractions and tourism/agriculture related businesses. Four logos – lodging, fuel, food, camping – exist now. The new logo would be administered by the Michigan Department of Transportation; and
- a moratorium on permits so no new billboard permits would be issued. Approximately 14,000 billboards have been erected in Michigan, and another 2,200 permits have been issued with no signs erected yet.

“During my long career, in which I traveled many hundreds of thousands of miles around our beautiful state, it has only reinforced my long-held conviction that billboards do more damage to our landscape and vistas than any commercial or informational value they claim,” Kelley said. “At the very least Michigan should limit and control the proliferation of billboards.”

The bills will be introduced in the Senate next week.

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